

HILL COUNTRY FUTURES

Farmer Perspective series

Economic diversification and resilience



We have had the privilege of listening to a range of people involved in hill country farming. This article is part of a short series that provides insights on some of the biggest sector issues our interviewees identified.

Economic diversification is thought to be a pathway that farmers can take to build resilience. Hill country farmers are dealing with multiple crises and issues such as climate change, global market shifts and Covid-19. Diversifying businesses and land use may provide a pathway to reducing this uncertainty and building a more resilient future. But what do farmers think of economic diversification?

Types of alternative income

around

66% of all interviewees mentioned economic diversification

“Diversifying does give you resilience.”

Representative Farmer

“Something will be up and something will be down. It gives you the flexibility to change enterprises.”

Representative Farmer

Forms of diversification that interviewees identified as either already happening or as having potential to develop:



6%

Off-farm income/
investments



12%

Alternative
livestock



17%

Beekeeping/honey
production



17%

Forestry



21%

Accommodation/
tourism



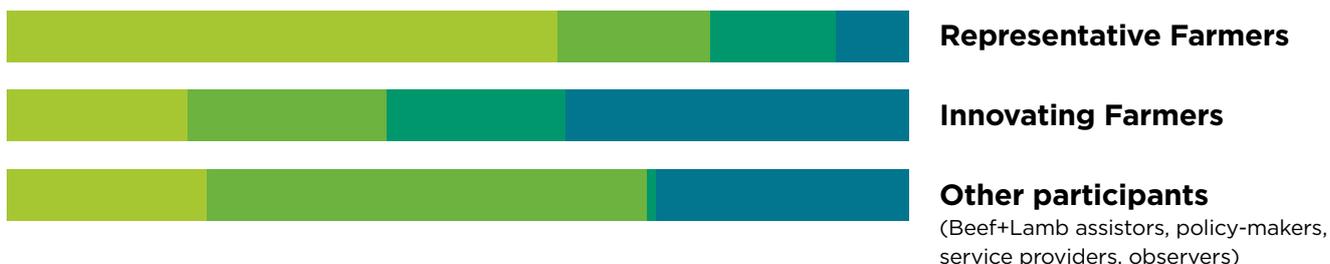
27%

Alternative crops

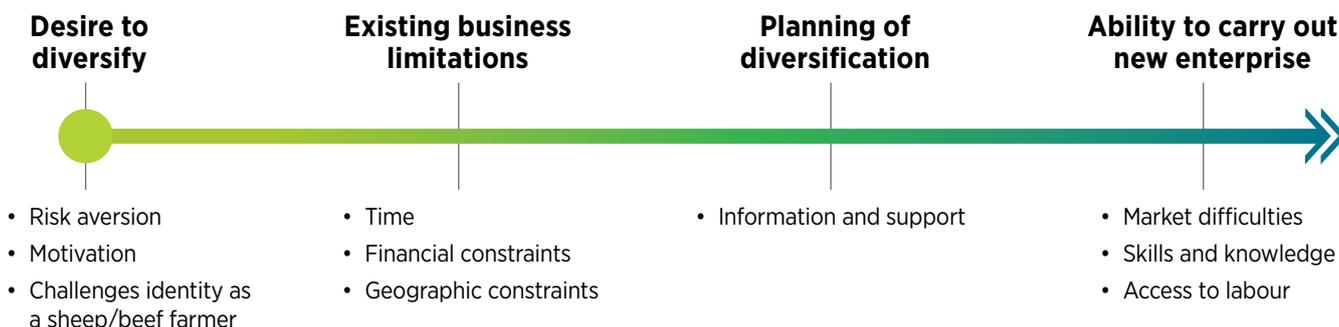
Benefits of economic diversification

Of those who mentioned economic diversification, four broad benefits emerged. Some groups referred to particular benefits more than others.

- Spreading risk/alternative income
- Personal enjoyment and fulfillment
- More ecologically sustainable land use
- Community enhancement - employment and attracting visitors



Barriers to economic diversification



Supporting economic diversification

Economic diversification is not a “one-size fits all” pathway to resilience.

Two strategies that may help farmers and entrepreneurs are:



Public infrastructure development

Physical and digital infrastructure improvements in rural communities can improve viability of diversified enterprises.



More effective land sharing arrangements

Making connections between landowners and people with the skills and financial resources to support diversification.

